

EAST PROVIDENCE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT

Waddington School Library

101 Legion Way

East Providence, Rhode Island 02915

Special School Committee Meeting

August 30, 2005

Open Session

Mr. Gouveia called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM. All members were present: Robert Faria, Eileen Lovett, David Medeiros, Mildred Morris and Antone Gouveia. Also present were Manuel Vinhateiro, Superintendent of Schools and Andrew Thomas, Esq.

A motion was made by Mrs. Morris to move to Executive Session in accordance with RI General Laws, Section 42-46-5 (a) (1) & (a) (2) Litigation, seconded by Mrs. Lovett. Vote 5-0.

The School Committee reconvened the Public Session at 7:30 PM. A motion was made by Mrs. Morris, seconded by Mr. Medeiros to return to open session. Vote 5-0.

The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag was led by Mr. Faria and a Moment of Silence was observed.

Report of the Superintendent

Personnel Recommendations

Appointments

Maribeth Finn Special Education, High School

Matthew Tsonos Health, High School

Judith Williams Reading, High School (1 Yr. Only)

Crystal Cunha Special Education, Martin Middle School

Motion: Mrs. Morris/Second: Mr. Medeiros. Vote 5-0.

Unfinished Business

Smoking Policy ;V Second Passage ;V Mr. Vinhateiro reviewed the recommended changes regarding penalties and the community service component. A motion was made by Mrs. Morris, seconded by Mrs. Lovett to approve second passage. Roll call vote: Mr. Faria, aye; Mrs. Lovett, aye; Mr. Medeiros, aye; Mrs. Morris, aye; Mr. Gouveia, aye. Vote 5-0.

2005-2006 Budget Work Session

Mr. Vinhateiro stated that at a prior meeting he presented a PowerPoint listing the needs of the School Department. A print-out copy was provided to the public and nothing has changed since that last meeting. The amount of the increase in the next fiscal year is \$3,686,162 and he explained several areas of increased expenditures as follows:

„X Four additional custodians (the elementary schools are cleaned every other night). This area was cut last year to such a point that we cannot staff every school every night. This practice has been found to be inefficient.

„X \$90,000 for the continuation of three School Resource Officers; this has been funded under a federal grant for the first three years which will be expiring. These officers are a vital part of the school community; their work is preventative in nature and they provide a welcome ear for students, which is priceless. The Police Chief and the Superintendent agree 100% that they are a vital part of the School Department and will split the cost (half each).

„X Secondary curriculum director is desperately needed to serve approximately 4000 secondary students; a person with secondary expertise is needed. Although there has been past criticism of too many staff members, the Annenberg Institute, through Rhode Island Department of Education, conducted an audit and came back with information which said we were woefully understaffed. There are

many employees sharing multiple responsibilities.

„X Energy ¡V the budgeted amount may not be enough; we have 11 large buildings to heat; only Waddington is air conditioned. The cost of natural gas is also increasing.

„X Benefits (predominantly health and retirement benefits) have increased; Blue Cross is projecting a 12% increase; retirement benefits increased this year; the only relief is on the teacher side; municipal has a 30% increase.

„X Debt service - \$90,000 in the budget for Waddington's new roof; Orlo roof; we are into a five year funding cycle for debt service, which is reflected in this budget.

Mr. Vinhateiro related that these items account for 95% of the increases in this budget.

A five-year historical perspective on Special education increases indicated an increase of \$5,261,789 between 1999/2000 and 2004/2005; a 56.17% increase.

Personnel Reductions ¡V Mr. Vinhateiro explained that at the start of this school year, there will be 42 less full time positions than in 2003 as follows: 4 Education Specialists position, Net 8.5 teaching positions (reduced 12.5 general education positions and added 4

special education positions), ESL Supervisor position reduced to stipend position. From a statewide perspective, the Per Pupil Expenditure for East Providence is \$10,580 versus the state average of \$11,046 (East Providence ranks 23 out of the 36 school districts). A Proposed Expenditures Chart indicates that 63% of the budget is allocated to salaries; education is about teaching, which is a staff related service. 87% is allocated to salaries and benefits. Mr. Vinhateiro also explained that some children in our community must be sent to outside placements which cost from a low of \$28,000 to a high of over \$100,000. These expenses are very difficult to predict; therefore, he and the City Manager agreed to include 85% of these costs in the budget; any excess will remain with the City.

Mr. Gouveia asked about Medicaid reimbursement. Mr. Vinhateiro explained that approximately \$1.5 million is expected in reimbursement; however, less services are qualifying than in the past. Mr. Gouveia stated that contractual agreements cannot be argued.

The City Manager, Mr. Fazioli, said there is cooperation between the School Department and the City; we were able to bring the deficit down last year and have communicated that the impact of this budget will increase taxes and we need to find ways to raise revenue. The tax base is not rising fast enough to keep up with expenses. The City faces many of the same challenges: municipal pension, health care costs, etc. and resources are limited. The City needs to find a way;

we need to sit with all the collective bargaining units at once and open the contracts; he will propose this to the City Council next week. In the next two weeks, he will present the budget but he cannot support the requested increase. People cannot pay much more; we all need to find a way to do it better; he wants to continue cooperating with the School Department and they need to stand united and work cooperatively with all bargaining units in order to provide services to the taxpayers. Mr. Gouveia said the School Committee is available to sit down at any time and they do want to do that; the School Committee is responsible for the education of the students first, but also committed to this.

Councilman Caine said the big issue is the existing contracts out there; we are continually running a deficit; City is paying for the schools. One issue is to look at the co-pays; the health care keeps growing and the COLA; the step increases, etc. need to be addressed.

He would like to get involved in an analysis of the collective bargaining agreements; what are we paying, how much are we paying and how it compares to the private sector. Taxpayers cannot afford another increase and we need to look for joint collective bargaining issues.

Public Comment

Mrs. Edna Snow, 128 Allerton Avenue was concerned about health care costs; we may be able to join United Healthcare to reduce costs.

Mr. Vinhateiro said he has received solicitation from others; however,

we have one year left on the Blue Cross Contract, but he thought it would be wonderful to have one state plan. Mrs. Snow asked about co-pay. Mr. Vinhateiro said in the last agreement, they increased doctors' visits, hospital fees, etc.

Mr. Bob Enos, 11 Millburn Road said the School Committee works for the City's taxpayers; people are moving out because they cannot afford to live here any more. He would like the ending budget for the year 2004 zero based budget; legal and purchased services outdoor textbooks; we need to think outside of the box. Why do we need two departments to cut grass and remove snow? He will spend any time needed to work on the budget. He questioned \$12,000 for snow blowers. (Mrs. Morris said that at one time, the School Department and the City considered combining services and consultants said it could not be done). Mr. Enos said every time the budget meetings are the same; if you never ask, you never get anything.

Joseph F. Martin Jr., 22 Charlotte Street, Riverside said he keeps hearing about unions, when it is the employers who create the jobs. When he looks at a 5.8% increase it makes his blood curdle; he feels badly for the young people who want to bring kids up here; he will have to be moving out soon. He talked about co-pay; it costs him \$700 per month plus Medicare and he still co-pays. He said the School Committee is part of the problem and the taxpayers have had it.

Mary Marcos, Indian Road said this is a working community; she works for the state and in 2005 everyone should be expected to pay health care. They have already been penalized on the taxes before and if they take another hit, people will have to move. We do not live in that kind of city; Barrington has taxes like this. We cannot have everything in this day and age.

Corrine, 15 Circle Drive ¡V Purchased her home last year and does not want to pay Barrington taxes; she pays \$2000 per quarter for health insurance and still pays the doctor. She said we need to be innovative about what we do; teachers work on steps whether they are good or bad; asked about merit pay. We cannot afford this; there has to be a way; we cannot allow the unions to hold us hostage.

Jack Fahey, Pawtucket Avenue ¡V representing the East Providence Taxpayers¡ Association read a statement ¡V He said the association is very disturbed, concerned and greatly alarmed by lack of a cohesive policy supporting all functions of government, which has created loss of efficiency and driving up the taxes. They demand that the elected officials stop it. East Providence Taxpayers¡ Association rejects the budget with unsustainable costs creating unnecessary burdens and hardships; the community is very uneasy and the School Committee gets an F on their report card. There were signs this was coming. The budget is not acceptable; the School Department exists for educating the children. Regarding the increases in the budget, he felt that four custodial positions are not

necessary; prioritize the workload better and the School Resource Officers should not be in the school budget, but on the City side. He doesn't think the Secondary Curriculum Director Position is necessary. (Mr. Gouveia explained that it was eliminated last year and they are only trying to reinstate it. Mr. Vinhateiro explained that the Assistant Superintendent is covering both jobs presently.)

Mr. Fahey related that the group feels that the funds for the two maintenance vehicles should have been available in a appreciation account. (Mr. Vinhateiro said that capital has been put in the budget before and is the first thing to be cut, because of unfunded mandates and benefit increases. Mr. Vinhateiro said that last year the bargaining units gave up raises; they were not deferred, but eliminated. This was very generous of the bargaining units). Mr. Fahey indicated that statistics show that 60% of the School Department staff earns \$60,000.

A short recess was taken. The School Committee reconvened.

Thomas Riley, Pawtucket Avenue said he has lived in the City 25 years and has been running a shop for 20 years and would have been bankrupt if he ran it this way. Property owners pass increases on to renters, heating cost increases, and the management needs to have the ability to say no; 87% of the budget is dedicated to salaries and benefits. After reevaluation and tax increases, this is not acceptable. There are step increases for teachers every year along with increases

yearly. He pays Blue Cross about \$12,000 every year and no co-pay is not acceptable. He feels the unions are just looking to justify their existence and we don't need them; we can't afford the SROs or the custodians. Discussion about special education and services provided. Mr. Vinhateiro explained that federal mandates were originally funded at 40% and we are now down to funding at 18%. Mr. Riley said they are all elected as managers to say no. We have to reopen the contracts as this is not working for us.

Mr. Gouveia said all points are well taken; the facts are relatively simple: our employees are under contract.

Elizabeth Sharper, 212 Center Street works as a budget analyst for Newport and she is against the budget; she felt that we need to have cost sharing of health care. The City of Newport has no contracts at all now; also she said that increases of health insurance are based on usage and when co-pay increases, use decreases. Newport did a study on schools and they decided to pool the finance offices into one. Also, negotiations are done by a private negotiator. She is concerned about a deficit on either side.

Kevin Costa said his son goes to Whiteknact and is doing well in reading with the special education services provided to him.

A motion was made by Mr. Faria to hold off the vote now on the budget; the public has spoken, Mrs. Morris seconded the motion as

she thought it is important to sit down with the City to discuss this.

Mr. Gouveia said he has been here and there with good and bad management; there are gaps which need to be filled: where the budget is now and where it has been. In prior years, the City Council cut the budget even more than the School Committee and deficits occurred. The Emergency Finance Committee was set up to review the school budget, as numbers that had been presented and passed by the School Committee were not always accurate in the past. The Superintendent cut jobs, restructured ESL and Special Ed and as a result, we have 42 less positions. The School Committee leased Grove Avenue School building, sold the Thompson School building, gave up the Warren Avenue property to the City and the Tristum Burgess property was sold recently. Past School Committees have tried to rectify problems with past budgets. This School Committee asked for what is needed today including contractual obligations. Mr. Gouveia will keep the taxpayer in mind; however, it is the responsibility of the School Committee to provide an education to the students of East Providence. Mr. Gouveia is prepared to approve this budget and work with the City. The School Committee wants to meet on common ground; but will not take away any program from any student. Mr. Gouveia said he was ready to vote for the budget. Mrs. Morris said she was ready to vote, but has listened to the taxpayers and now feels we must get together with the City.

Roll Call Vote: Mr. Faria, aye; Mrs. Lovett, aye Mr. Medeiros, aye; Mrs.

Morris, aye; Mr. Gouveia, aye.

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A motion was made to move to Executive Session by Mrs. Morris, seconded by Mr. Medeiros. Vote 5-0. All aye.

A motion was made to move back to open session. A motion was made by Mrs. Morris to seal the minutes of the Executive Session, seconded by Mrs. Lovett. Vote 5-0.

A motion was made by Mr. Medeiros to adjourn at 10:30 PM, seconded by Mrs. Morris. Vote 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia A. Iannelli, Executive Secretary

David A Medeiros, Clerk of the Committee